

Metaphysical Art - Transitions of Creativity

A European epoch like ours, which carries within itself the overwhelming burden of so many civilizations and the maturity of so many spiritual periods, is fated to produce an art that, from a certain viewpoint, seems to be like one of mythical uneasiness. Such an art arises through the work of those few who are gifted with particular clarity of vision and sensitivity.

Giorgio de Chirico, "On Metaphysical Art" 1919

In this age of digital and other technological advancements, where information is transmitted at the speed of light, where a multitude of things happen simultaneously, where the viewer's attention is more saturated as ever and where all it takes to skip to the next thing is a single click of the mouse, it appears that everything has already been done and what we observe are to a great extent recurrences.

Not too many genuinely revolutionary ideas have materialized in the art world in recent times. Audiences and critics frequently find similarity between the works of the last few decades of the evolution of Contemporary Art and numerous established art movements. We often hear comments like *'This piece reminds or looks like surrealism'* or *'That one, probably, has the aesthetics of pop art'* or *'Those are simply a mix of impressionism and minimalism'*.

In the last few decades, an idea has taken root that *'the art of painting, and perhaps other forms of arts are almost dead'*. However, there are still zillions of intriguing art pieces vying for attention all over the planet.

Are we then condemned to continue re-visiting, re-sampling and mixing previous ideas, deceiving ourselves that the resulting creation is new way to look at things? Is it possible to create anything genuinely authentic? How do we define true creativity?

Without doubt, we are neither the first nor the last generation with concerns akin to those afore mentioned. Certainly, it's valuable to look back and to understand the history of a subject for many reasons, but it is of even greater importance to be aware of conditions of both the past and the present. The essay "*On Metaphysical Art*" by Giorgio de Chirico, one of the founders of the metaphysical painting style, opens timeless question of how new ways of expression come into existence.

Metaphysical art stands out for its illusionistic, mysterious, dream-like quality of imagery, a high level of contrast between light and shadow and purposely distorted object's proportions, all of which were very new approaches to painting at that time. The emphasis was to change how people perceive reality and the surrounding world.

Earlier, artists had tried to mimic reality with absolute accuracy, abiding by the rules of perspective, light and shadow. Reality was considered to be what we see with the naked eye; there was no concept of any different perception of reality. The norm was that reality should be represented, as much as possible, as it is actually seen, typically from the one static point at one given moment of time. But gradually artists started questioning how far we could trust our eyes, whether we could be certain that reality is what we think it is and whether it could be rather different?

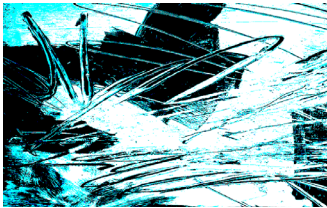
Georio de Cirico sets an example of how the same scene could be differently perceived depending on the angle. Furthermore, according to him the change in perception happens not just by shifting in physical space but also because of the break in the linear logic of what we see. This rupture in human logic or common sense is what might be called the metaphysical aspect of physical reality.

Before we discuss the kind of art that claims to carry metaphysical meaning and genuine creativity in today's world, it is important to understand the term '*Metaphysics*', which is not an easy word to classify. Different sources give different definitions, placing metaphysics in categories between science and philosophy. Although, there is no consensus about the origin of metaphysics or what qualifies as metaphysics, some of the definitions are quite explicit.

Concepts that have been associated with the domain of metaphysics include, but are not limited to philosophical issues about the fundamental principles of being, intellectual and subconscious awareness, the first cause, the true nature of things, the relation between objects and its properties, disparity in space and time and the notions of probability and predetermination. As example, notorious questions of how do we think, what is an origin of creativity and do we have a free will, partially relate to the metaphysics, as well.

Within metaphysical painting style some artists tried to answer these questions and to stimulate people's minds in an attempt to open their perception of reality, by showing that it is possible to see the world from other perspectives. It would be more accurate to assume that the metaphysical attributes in painting left possibilities of such envisions intentionally open. It must be added, that metaphysical painting is foremost art and not science or philosophy, although it was definitely inspired by them.

Giorgio de Chirico describes it by the following:



It useless to believe, however, as some deluded and utopian people, that the new art can redeem and regenerate humanity, that it might give humanity a new sense of life, a new religion. Humanity is and will continue to be just what it has been in the past. It accepts and will increasingly accept this art. The day will come when people will go to museums to look at it and study it!

A bold presumption that can be made at this point is that the Art merges stiff and inflexible material logic with metaphysical inconsistencies. It might stimulate and motivate the viewer to think, but it neither preaches nor imposes a predetermined set of rules. Metaphysical art is not religious art, it is a form of artistic expression that remains free from the impositions of the Church that had influenced painters in the past. Metaphysical art in many of its incantations demonstrates explorations in free thinking, by the people of the future who have their own creed and vision.

Religious art may seem archaic, but the art of a free thinking people can never become outdated. Metaphysical painting of the previous century has its place in the history of Arts and has had an enormous impact on subsequent artistic movements and techniques. The metaphysical questions raised by artists in the past and in the present are very much the same, but circumstances differ tremendously. Therefore, what matters is how those questions are being applied today and whether their realization can be called Metaphysical Art of the 21st century? Here, we are talking about art that is influenced by metaphysics and art that seeks new ways of expression previously unexplored, we are talking about real creativity.

But how do we define originality and what the novelty really is? How do we decide what is on the cutting edge or what can be considered as genuine creation? The newness is always based on the preexisting. It might be rooted in growing from past experiences, but it is not an assembly of existing aspects that have been randomly extracted and put together in a new order. Art cannot be considered entirely new, if it is merely a resample of pre-existing.

Metaphysics works with non-material questions, but uses material means to express them or per Timothy Leary on '*non-materiality to be something we have not yet been able to measure with our present level of equipment*'.

Let us suppose that art beyond our present level of understanding already exists. Possibly, this art is genuinely new metaphysical art we have discussed, but it still would make no sense to us, because we would lack the physical and mental ability to process it. We are able to understand only the art which can be perceived by the five senses and by logic or intellect.

If we move from metaphysical toward material logic and its tool i.e. our intellect the linearity of rational thinking is chiefly built on the foundations of historically inherited experience of mankind (*collective unconsciousness* by Karl Gustav Jung), individual life experience, science, behavioral patterns, emotional imprints and mass-media informational flows. A key constitutional element is the duality of the process related to logical assumption-analysis-assessment. There is a good reason for this, before the development of logical intellect nature provided or dictated uncomplicated action-reaction related motives that nurtured the emergence of simple duality. There were habitual dualities like day and night, life and death, enemies and fellows, black and white and so on, all very familiar to the general tendency to divide any quality into its opposite extremes. This has doubtlessly played an important role in developing the human mind and its tools – intellect and logic, which have been necessary for basic survival and eventual development of civilizations.

The human mind is basically a biological computer with a hint of creativity, which is merely an error in linear logic. Creativity cannot be born out of ideal implementations of linear equations, as it naturally goes beyond existing rules. This presents an intellectual trap. Can we say that going beyond logic is creative? Well, yes and no. Does something really go beyond or builds up on variances within boundaries of existing concepts? There is lot of ambiguity here, but at least the modern world has brought to surface further billions of interpretations that collectively move forward toward 'next evolutionary stage'.

Despite the abundance of technologies, telecommunications, tools, social interactivity and, general freedom, do we find ourselves somehow limited? Do we believe that creativity is endless? Do we feel that some obstacles block our path towards the next creative milestone? What limits true creativity nowadays? How do we maximize the speed and scope of creativity and achieve smart and practical solutions as results?

For example, we inevitably associate promotional activities for the purpose of attracting (market) attention with high financial burdens. On the other hand, applying less standardized, non-linear logic with the creative use of the Internet in general and social media in particular, shows that old concepts may be proved wrong. Solutions born out of creativity are often perceived to have come out of nothing, at least logically.

Time-based constraints can either be real ones or the product of our adherence to imaginative linearity of consequences. As in the case of a lack of money, working under time pressure can actually enhance creativity and productivity at the same time. Time constraints force us to avoid the trap of perfectionism. Another benefit of speed is one we do not like to think about—one can fail faster. Failure is crucial to innovation, and the less time one spends on a wrong idea, the more chance one has to move to the right one.

On the one hand, we face barriers and burdens of the past, time limits, institutions, market preferences and so forth. On the other hand, we often impose constraints on ourselves that are purely fictional. We accept certain symbolic boundaries as true barriers, even if they are not real or are actually easily breakable. Beliefs are hidden command patterns in most instances. For instance, baby elephants are kept chained by the leg to an iron pole. Later when they are much stronger, their masters keep them in control with simple ropes and light wooden sticks. If elephants exert their full powers over a man with a stick it would be impossible to control them. However, the elephants believe that the thin rope has the power to stop them.

Imagine looking down on Earth from space. You would see no national or state boundary lines. Borders, which serve to provide humans with a degree of liberty, also lead to customs and immigration problems, socio-economic disputes, contradictory proclamations, edicts, the growing complexity of legal systems and the partial imposition of mores and cultural norms. These lines do not exist outside our regulated and conditioned minds. Traditions, institutional rules, industry standards and best practices in marketing – are all consensual hallucinations. Now, breaking these rules logically will create a mess, breaking creatively may open new horizons for humanity.

"It is an axiomatic truth that madness is inherent phenomenon in all profound artistic manifestations."

Metaphysical components in Art have always been highly functional. The Art itself has achieved the qualities of non-linear logical representations, which are a foundation or a seed that can be nurtured into multitudes of perceptions beyond core intellectual duality. It provides humans with more ways to express glimpses of truths, as a channel or universal language, where the artist is nothing more than a kid playing in a sandbox, genuinely involved in randomness.

About author: Sweet Samson is an international artist and designer, currently living in Los Angeles. She invented Dynamic Carbon technique, experiments with application of various technologies, mixed media and innovative materials. This essay Metaphysical Art – Transitions of Creativity is part of Samson's upcoming book Converting Art into Reality.